1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
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554 pass them by because sacred powers often give a man prestige from which he may attain local eminence as an important elder, if they are combined with wealth, ability, and wide kinship connexions.

554 613 231 791 Next to prophets and leopard-skin chiefs the ritual status that carries with it most prestige is that of the *wut ghok*, the Man of the Cattle. Certain lineages have hereditary ritual powers in relation to cattle and are asked to cure sick beasts and to make barren cows fruitful, though only some members of these lineages use their powers. Like leopard-skin chiefs, Men of the Cattle are often members of stranger lineages and not of the aristocratic clan of their tribe. I was told that their curse is feared, as it can be directed to the cattle, and that Nuer do not care to offend them, but, outside tradition, I have not recorded any occasion of its utterance. Apart from the few Men of the Cattle who play a part in the regulation of Age-sets (see Chap. VI), and those who are sometimes consulted about migration to new pastures, they have no public functions. One *wut ghok* of the Eastern Gaajok became very rich and powerful a generation ago, but his prestige was largely due to his possession of magic.

554 613 791 Besides the *kuaa muon*, who has a ritual relationship to the earth, and the *wut ghok*, who has a ritual relationship to the cattle, there are a number of totemic specialists whose ritual connexion with lions, crocodiles, weaver birds, &c., enables them to influence the behaviour of these creatures. A totemic specialist is a possessor (*gwan*) of the spirit (*kwoth*) of his totem. Totemic specialists have no political significance and have no social influence in virtue of their powers alone. There is a war specialist whose duty it is to shake a spear in the face of the enemy and to deliver an invocation against them. He is known as *gwan muot*, possessor of the spear, or *ngul*, and is often, perhaps always, a member of a senior lineage of the dominant clan of the tribe, for he invokes the spear by the spear-name of the clan. There are also magicians of various kinds: leeches, diviners, owners of medicines, and owners of fetishes. Of these specialists only owners of fetishes become prominent members of their communities on account of their ritual powers. Nuer [776] are very much afraid of fetish spirits and believe them to be so powerful that they will even purchase them with cattle. A fetish-owner may become the most influential man in the village, and I have been surprised at the respect and fear with which his neighbours sometimes treat him. Nevertheless, he has no defined authority in controlling the relations of the villagers to one another nor does he represent the village in its relations with neighbouring communities.

8:Howell E, G-5 (1942-1944)1954
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CHAPTER VI

RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS IN RELATION TO LAW

IN the preceding chapters I have described what may be called the secular aspects of Nuer customary law. The terms of the law described are largely rational, and only at certain points and in certain contexts have religious and magical associations been mentioned. The isolation of rational procedures from the religious background, however, gives an incomplete picture, and some mention must be made of Nuer religion and ritual sanctions in relation to legal concepts. To do so is to embark on a highly complex subject and one which, as an administrator, I had least time and opportunity to investigate. There is also a danger of over-simplification and generalization. The reader must bear this in mind.

Nuer Religious Beliefs

The Nuer are an intensely religious people. As a basis is the concept of *kwoth*, an all-pervading deity associated with the sky but present to a greater or lesser degree in all things, which supplies, directly or indirectly, an explanation for phenomena which cannot be accounted for in terms of everyday life.[1] This applies to material objects, human beings, events, and situations. Thus a particularly vicious snake may be a manifestation of *kwoth*, thunder and lightning are *kwoth*, a magician is possessed by or possesses *kwoth*, an unexplained accident or illness is due to *kwoth*, spirits are *kuthni* (a plural form of the word *kwoth*) and the unpredictable future is *ruac kwoth*, literally 'God-talk' or 'the will of God'. The word *kwoth* also has connexion with the whole range of spiritual forms and concepts: ancestral spirits, household spirits, spirit medicines, talking spirits, sky spirits, earth spirits. The special functions of the ritual experts of the kind already mentioned and their magical powers are derived from and are dependent upon *kwoth*. Nuer themselves find great difficulty in describing their beliefs because *kwoth* is accepted without

[1] In a recent article Professor Evans-Pritchard says: 'God is a spirit who is in the sky and also everywhere, he is the creator of the universe, the father and friend of man and the guardian of the social order; and in comparison with him man is an ignorant and puny creature. . . . There is nothing which can properly be called a cult of God, the spirit who is in the sky, and indeed the absence of a cultus is very much in keeping with the whole Nuer metaphysic.' 'A Note on Nuer Prayers', *Man*, Vol. LII, 140, 1952.

8:Howell E, G-5 (1942-1944)1954
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query and is an abstract idea which they cannot explain in terms of specific examples; but this does not cause confusion to them because, although all aspects of their religion are an indirect extension of the idea of *kwoth*, there is a special terminology which refers to every kind of manifestation and category.

For example, there are, as will be seen later, *kolangni*, special spiritual forms which come into the possession of and possess individuals or kinship groups, and of these there are many different types of manifestation. They are often the cause of physical illness or misfortune. A particular individual may be subject to epileptic fits or periods of mental instability, and speaking in general terms the Nuer will say *teke kwoth*, 'he has or is possessed by *kwoth*'; but they will usually go further and qualify this statement by saying that he is possessed by some particular manifestation of *kwoth* which has a definite name. In some cases the individual will have called upon himself evil effects (though the same spirit may equally bring beneficial effects) in angering the spirit by some action, or more probably by failure to carry out some ritual obligation. There are special functionaries whose duty, in return for fees paid, usually in cattle, is first to diagnose the cause of the trouble and then to suggest a remedy, often assisting in the ritual which follows.

Kwoth is sometimes spoken of in the rôle of creator, but creation is more often explained in mythology by reference to ancestors. Such ancestors are not consciously thought of as manifestations of *kwoth*, although their origin would be explained as *kwoth*.[1] Ancestors are intermediaries between man and God; prayer is offered through them to *kwoth*. There is therefore a close relation between the concept of *kwoth* and religious practices associated with a patrilineal descent group. The word *thek* is used to express the idea of respect to ancestral spirits, and also, by extension, respect for kinship relations. Misfortunes and illness, sometimes referred to as *nueer*, are often believed to be caused by ancestral spirits who are angered on account of a breach of observance—such as neglect of prayers, which should be addressed to them—or by actual relations between living descendants. An offensive action against a kinsman demands not only some compensation in the form of apology or even material indemnification but also prayer and expiation. There is therefore a religious sanction for kinship obligations and observances.[2]

[1] E.g. when asking Nuer to relate their genealogies, one often finds that they get stuck at a particular ancestor—and there is, of course, always an ancestor beyond whom they cannot go. Pressed for an answer they will simply say that this man came from *kwoth*.

[2] *Thek*. A full explanation of the word *thek* is given in an article by Professor Evans-Pritchard in *Man*, Vol. XLIX, 96, 1949. He says: 'We can therefore perhaps best think of *thek* as a term indicating a category of ritual prohibition or taboo, and of *nueer* as a term commonly used both for the infringement and the sanction of this class of taboo.' My own view is that *thek* implies not only negative action in the form of prohibition or avoidance but also positive action in carrying out some observance or duty.

8:Howell E, G-5 (1942-1944)1954
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action in spilling the blood of a fellow man. There is no concept of Man as a member of Mankind, only as a member of a kinship group, and reprobation is expressed by them alone. Moreover God is not angered at the death of a human being, for God is not concerned with humans in this general sense of protection and responsibility; but the particular manifestations of God, represented in the kinship group by ancestral spirits and by the spirit of the dead man (*cien*), are indignant and cry out for vengeance.

There are therefore two reactions present: first, the reaction of the kinsmen of the slain, which is a reaction of indignation at personal loss, reduction in their numbers, and the damage to the continuity of their group; and this finds further expression in religious concepts associated with the kinship group. The second reaction is that of the killer's group, who demand that, in their own interests as well as his own, he shall perform those rites of expiation which will neutralize the effects of spiritual contamination emanating from the spirits associated with the dead man's kin. They may also express disapproval of his action, for he has brought upon them not only spiritual dangers but the threat of violence, and more probably the loss of the cattle which they will have to pay to restore the peace and regain their security.

Homicide has not yet become the concern of society as a whole and, except that other persons may find themselves involved in a feud which may spread along traditional lines of political cleavage, those outside the specific groups affected are not interested. The existence of a segmentary system and the absence of organized political authority covering all sections of Nuer society mean that there is no corporate body which will take action against the killer in the interests of society as a whole. The kinship group of the deceased combines against the killer and, by extension, according to the principles of collective responsibility, against the kinsmen of the killer. The latter are then compelled to adopt an attitude of defensive opposition, but within their own group they have also to demand that the killer shall perform those acts which will restore to him his ritual status.

From these observations it will be seen that—

(i) Homicide is considered a wrong, though not against society as a whole. The element of wrongness is relative to the relationship in the social structure of the parties involved. The killing of a stranger, especially of a foreigner, who does not come within the most expanded form of the social structure, is not really wrong (*duer*) at all. It is neither a crime nor a private delict, for there is no political sanction involved and no social relationship which might demand restitution. There is no motive for composition nor any mechanism for achieving it. It is, however, a situation which demands expiation in the form of ritual and sacrifice, which the killer performs with the assistance of the Leopard-Skin Chief. The ghost of the dead stranger,

12:Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1930-1931) 1933
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614 their common kinship by a common sentiment towards the clan name and ritual symbols and by the prohibition of marriage between their
613 families. But when they belong to the same minor lineage they recognise their kinship by awareness of the exact relationship in which they stand to one another in the genealogical system. Nevertheless any competent Nuer genealogist can, if pressed, produce a good table of genealogical ascent to the founder of his clan with the result that it is possible, even in such a huge clan as the GAT GAN KIIR of the Jekany tribes, to place every single clansman and clanswoman on a single genealogical chart showing their genealogical descent from Kir and, therefore, the genealogical relationship of any clansman to any other clansman. Such a chart would not be likely to embody a correct genealogy, but it would be recognised by the Nuer as being substantially correct.

614 619 Consequently one cannot say that relationship ends with the clan or that it is the largest of Nuer lineages, but we have to define it as the largest exogamous lineage. For the common ancestor of most Nuer clans is the same person. Jackson has given a very good account of the way in which the Nuer clans are part of a related system which I propose to call the Family of Nuer Clans. It is necessary to say that it is not at all clear from Jackson's or other accounts, including my own notes, how this family of clans are inter-related. It is particularly a problem which requires detailed research among the " Homeland Nuer " to the west of the Nile. One of the reasons why it is difficult to draw more than an approximate tree of the Family of Nuer Clans is the confusion which has always existed between the tribe and the clan, with the inevitable result that when we are told that Lou or Lak are sons of such-and-such an ancestor we are helpless, since tribesmen of Lou and Lak form political aggregates of composite ancestry and cannot possibly have common ancestors. What is meant is that the dominant clan element of the tribe are the sons of the such-and-such an ancestor, but as his tree of descent is not given it is difficult to proceed upon such a supposition.

614 173 773 776 I will condense here the main discoveries of Mr. Jackson in this field, together with the writings of the late Capt. Fergusson and notes taken by myself. There figure in all accounts certain mythical persons who link the ancestors of the Nuer clans to Kwoth, God, who made them and from whom they are directly descended. In this essay the first persons we need notice are Gee and Ghaak, two brothers who are possibly to be

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
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342 Their huts are built with great care and skill. They are
361 cylindrical in form with a conical roof consisting of grass, reeds, or leaves, while the walls are made of mud; and are decidedly superior to the buildings of the Dinka, Anuak, and other kindred tribes. The houses stand in small groups, sometimes only two or three together, the land for cultivation lying immediately around each house.

342 In the dry season the men leave their villages to seek
233 better pasture in the swampy regions of the country. Here temporary huts of straw are erected for the young men who look after the cattle and milk them. During the night the cattle are driven into large enclosures of thorny trees; a fire of dried cow-dung is constantly kept smouldering, to protect the cattle from the stings of mosquitoes. When the rains begin to fall, about April, the people return to their villages to plant dura.

776 Very little is known about the religion of the Nuer. Miss Huffman mentions on page 56 some names of their gods, but we learn little as to their significance in the lives and beliefs of the people. While I was studying the Shilluk people in the Sudan in 1910, still another Nuer god, viz. Kot, was mentioned to me by a number of Nuer men whom I had with me for some time. This word Kot occurs in a large number of Nilotic languages, its general meaning is 'rain', but in Nuer it designates a god, the idea of this god being evidently connected with that of rain. To Kot is attributed the creation of the world, as the following report dictated to me by a native Nuer shows:[1]

[1] This record and the following ones were, together with the original Nuer text, first published in my study on the Nuer language in the *Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen. Afrikanische Studien*, p. 84 ff. Berlin, 1912.

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
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Chapter Two

RESOURCES OF THE NUER

WILD ANIMALS AND CATTLE

WILD animals abound in Nuerland. Lions, leopards, giraffes, buffaloes, elephants, hippos, monkeys are found as well as other species, and also crocodiles, snakes, and scorpions. 136

Sometimes animals are killed with spears (Fig. 4), sometimes traps are made to catch them. Holes are dug into which they fall and are unable to get out. Men sometimes chase them and drive them toward the trap which they have made. Giraffes may be killed in this way as they cannot run fast, especially if the ground be muddy. Monkeys are safe in Nuerland as a Nuer will not willingly kill them. If a monkey is killed, it will surely rain hard, but if it is killed in the dry season, the weather will only become cloudy. 224 [325]

Probably the largest snake found here is the python. Many of the snakes are deadly poisonous. One is a spitting snake. Another is said to bite and also sting its victim with its tail at the same time, much as a scorpion stings. Another snake, the 'thatut', is said to leave a tooth in the person it bites. The Nuer believe that if a person is once bitten by a 'thatut' no other snake will deign to bite him. 136 [325]

The number of cattle owned by individuals varies in different parts of Nuerland. Those who live along the Nile have many cattle. Those in the Garjak country have more cattle than those near Nasser. In the regions where cattle are more plentiful the number of cattle asked as a marriage price is greater. 231

Cattle with the wide-spreading long horns are the most desirable. A Nuer is afraid that a cow without horns may 231 776

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
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231 turn into a 'Lat' (a combination of ogre and cannibal which
● [77] figures largely in folk-lore tales. Nuer firmly believe in these Lats and fear them).

Nuer, be they men, women, or children love their cattle; they are the pride of the tribe. The people delight in being among them. When a boy has his tribal marks
[55] cut, he assumes an ox name in addition to his own.

[325] The cattle are always supposed to see the new moon one night before the people see it.

If a cow is sick, she is well cared for. Everything possible is done for her so far as the Nuer's knowledge goes. A wasps' nest is soaked in water and the mixture forcibly administered to the cow as a preventive against a certain fever.

A bunch of a certain kind of leaves tied about a cow's neck is supposed to help her if all is not right with her when she has just calved.

Muzzles made out of thorns are fastened on the mouth of a calf when they wish to prevent it from sucking.

The Nuer also have sheep, and numerous dogs may be seen.

[262] During the fishing season when many go to the fishing camps, the Nuer depends upon fish and milk for his food. The cattle are always taken to the fishing camp—for grazing is usually good—hence the milk supply.

THE FISHING SEASON

226 When the dry season is on, the river falls fast and the
221 Nuer is eager to fish. The rivers are full of fish, great big ones, including the Nile perch and several other large white fish which are specially desired for food. In December and January Nuer with their cattle move from the villages to the fishing camps. They build (Fig. 6)
[302] bee-hive-shaped houses—even the walls are of grass.

Chapter Seven

SOME NOTES ON RELIGION, SUPERSTITIONS, AND MORAL LAW

NUER GODS

776 THE Nuer has long feared and worshipped he knows not what. There are various gods, Deng, Wiu, Cwol, and others. Some have power over rain, some over crops, disease, death, or lightning.

778 825 Some animals are considered sacred, but what is sacred to one man is not necessarily held sacred by another. It may be the crocodile, or the land crocodile, or a certain kind of snake. Every Nuer is certain to have a sacred animal which he will neither kill nor eat.

782 Sheep and cattle are sacrificed on various grounds in order to appease one god or another.

[776] 766 When a person is struck by lightning and killed he is said to have been taken by the god of lightning—Cwol. His body is laid upon a rack that is made in his house or barn and then covered entirely—over, under, and on all sides—with wood, ash, and soil. The door of the house is closed and the house is left desolate except for its silent owner. A person who has been struck and killed by lightning is never buried in the ground as others are.

784 No one will touch a person who has been stunned by lightning until he regains consciousness, for fear the god in him may be transmitted by contact.

778 A Nuer always considers the relatives of one who has been killed by lightning as sacred.

[826] [784] Any one who has some physical or mental deformity may be considered as having a god in him and be regarded as sacred and avoided for that reason.

781 The Nuer worship is a worship of fear. The missionary feels as if he were living in Old Testament times, and

606 607 For a man's wife, avoidance is impracticable, but she treats her parents-in-law with great respect and, in the early days of marriage, keeps herself apart from them as much as possible. She is on joking terms with her husband's brothers since, among brothers, the wife of one is, in the social sense, the wife of all.(1)

DIVORCE

586 If a wife dies childless or if her husband divorces her the bride-wealth cattle have to be returned. If a child has been born and is left with the husband then the cattle are returned, minus six. If two children have been born, no cattle are returned. Divorce is recognised as having taken place only if cattle are returned; if a wife leaves her husband to live with another man, and her husband does not claim return of the bridewealth, any children she may bear are his. Divorce after the birth of a child is very unusual, and after the birth of a second child, almost unknown.

RITUAL AND OTHER CULTURAL FEATURES

TOTEMISM

●776 The various Nuer lineages have specific ritual attitudes towards certain natural objects and living creatures. They respect the lion, reptiles, birds and plants; some lineages respect rivers and streams but, for all Nuer, rivers are specially associated with the mother spirit, Dak Mandeang, who is held in reverence by all the people. Some lineages respect cattle with certain markings and therefore do not keep them. The largest clan in Nuerland - the Gaatgamkiir of the Jikany tribes - respect gourds, since, it is said, the ancestor of the clan was found in a gourd. In general, however, totems are associated with lineages rather than with clans.

[177] Nuer totems (*kwiith*) are neither peculiar nor particularly important, and the Nuer themselves state that the majority of the totems come from the Dinka; they further maintain that the *kuth* of Nuer lineages are sky spirits, or spirits of persons who have been killed by lightning and have become sky spirits. The totemic relationship is explained in the myths which tell how ancestors of the lineages and the members of the species related to the lineages, were born twins. A man respects his wife's totem and a woman her husband's, while children respect their mother's totem generally. A totemic relationship of the same type does not prevent marriage.

Respect for a totem consists in refraining from hurting it or eating it; in paying it some recognition and consideration, and in making an expression of regret should it be found dead. In turn the totemic species is expected not to cause any harm to those who respect it. Sacrifices and prayers are made to the totem and cattle are dedicated to it. The species itself is not worshipped although the representatives are

(1) Evans-Pritchard, Man, 1948, No.2, p.5.

15: Butt E-4 (No date) 1952 FJ22 Nuer FJ22

respected; it is the spiritual being, the *kwoth*, which the totem stands for, which is revered. The totems are symbols or manifestations of a spirit which can be in communion with men and beasts.(1) 776

Totem spirits are called *kuth piny* (earth spirits) a category which includes fetishes; this is in contrast to the much more important *kuth nhial*, sky spirits. Yet, although the two categories are thus distinguished, the Nuer maintain that they worship totemic spirits and that these spirits are with god in the sky. The totem seems to be the symbol of the spirit and the spirit to be an aspect of the spirit of the sky which is connected with the various lineages and is symbolised differently in each.

Kwoth

In addition to totemic spirits, *kwoth* also refers to 'god in the sky' and can mean any one of the sons of the sky god - the *kwoth dwanga*. Each sky spirit is associated with a certain aspect of nature; for example, Deng refers to the rain spirit. Another group of spirits are the *col wic* - the spirits of persons who have been killed by lightning and taken up to heaven. Persons supposed to have been taken into heaven by a whirlwind and those found dead in the bush without any apparent cause are also *col wic*. A *col wic* is considered to be a sacred spirit of his lineage - a *kwoth gool* - and most lineages have at least one of these spirits to whom cows are dedicated. Sometimes a *col wic* spirit enters into a member of his family or lineage and, when this happens, the man whom he possesses falls sick; on recovery, he makes a shrine in his homestead and becomes a prophet of Col (*guk cuol*), and the spirit of lightning contacts the people through him.(2) [791]

SACRIFICES

Sacrifices play an important part in all ritual practices, and are usually all of a similar nature. An animal is selected and is dedicated to a spirit by rubbing ashes along its back. An invocation is then made and the animal is killed by spearing it through the heart. It is cut in two halves when there is a cutting of social ties, and also at mortuary ceremonies when there is one half for the living and another for the dead. Sickness is the most frequent occasion for sacrifices. 782

THE CONCEPTS OF THEK AND NUER

Thek means 'to respect', and is used in various social contexts; for example, it denotes the behaviour expected of a man towards his parents-in-law; in blood feuds the kin of the slayer and of the slain may not eat from the utensils which the other party has used, and these are respected. In mortuary ceremonies a man's age-mates *thek* the meat which has been sacrificed in his honour. A man also pays respect to his totem. Failure to show respect where there is a *thek* relationship is thought to bring about misfortune.(3) Any serious sickness following the breach of a *thek* taboo is called *nuer*. 576 [753]

(1) Evans-Pritchard, *Annali Lateranensi*, 1949, Vol.XIII, p.247.
(2) Evans-Pritchard, *Man*, 1949, No.2, p.9.
(3) *Ibid.*, 1949, No.96, p.75.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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of descent. Other totems were added later. 'The spirits of their sacrifices (to which they sacrifice) entered into the generations of descent (*kath*).' This might happen in various ways, some of which I have described. An animal or plant, or rather Spirit in and through an animal or plant, helps a man in trouble, and so forth. The commonest aetiology is twin-birth of a man and a member of a natural species. Twin-birth is so stock an explanation of totemic affiliations among the Nuer that when asked why a certain lineage respect a certain species they often, if they do not know any story accounting for the association, say at once and without reflection that it must be because of a twin-birth of this kind. It is only when it would be totally unreasonable that a Nuer rejects this as a likely explanation. In discussing totemism with some Nuer on one occasion one of them told me that he had heard that there were people who respect fire. When I asked whether this meant that a man and fire had been born together my question was greeted with derision: 'How, now, could a woman carry fire in her womb?'

Strange though it may seem to us, Nuer claim that twin-births of men and animals have taken place not only in ancient times but also in recent generations. They may take place even today and occasion no surprise. I had not been long in Nuerland when one morning my Nuer servant Nhial came in some excitement to tell me that a woman of his village, where we were staying, had given birth to a hippopotamus and a male child, both dead. It was too late to see what happened, but I was told that the hippopotamus had been placed in a nearby stream and the child, being a twin and therefore in Nuer eyes a sort of bird, had been placed in a tree. In answer to my questions, I was further informed that it was uncertain whether the family would on account of what had happened respect hippopotamuses in future, though had the child lived he and his descendants would certainly have done so. The reason given for this particular twin-birth was that the woman's husband had killed several hippopotamuses and they had revenged themselves on him by stamping their likeness on one of the twins (*ca gat cal e rau*). In this case, therefore, one is in doubt whether what was taken to the stream was regarded as a hippopotamus in the full sense or not, for animals can stamp their likenesses on a human foetus; but at least the incident shows us how the totemic mentality of the Nuer inclined them at once to

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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774 224 further that when the tusks are removed they are first buried under the floor of a cattle byre before being cut up for distribution among such persons as have rights in them, and that when they are buried a sacrifice, called *kirpiny*, is made, the name of the sacrifice being the same as that made when a man is buried.[1]

774 778 The only occasions on which I have heard Nuer speak of creatures, other than cattle, or things having a *tie* was when they were discussing offerings of food and tobacco to fetishes, and in this case the usage was clearly metaphorical just as was their use of the word *cam*, to eat, in the same connexion. *Cam* is often used in a metaphorical sense to indicate that something is being appropriated, as when it is said of a man, usually a man with the evil eye or someone connected with the Government, that '*came nath*', 'he eats the people', that is, he takes something from, or exploits, the people. Nuer know very well that a fetish does not really eat the offerings. They only suppose that it in some way appropriates them, and since the offerings are obviously not materially appropriated they are more or less obliged to use the only available analogy and to speak of the fetish taking their 'souls'. Nuer do not attribute souls to food and tobacco, or to any other things. They are merely using the word in an attempt to explain their use in a very special and peculiar situation.

774 776 I have discussed this question partly because it was necessary to do so to make clear that in Nuer thought the soul is something essentially human which man has in addition to life, which he shares with other creatures, and partly because it is of some theoretical importance. In the light of the discussion it will be [121] seen that the so-called animistic theory of religion, chiefly associated with the name of Tylor, cannot be sustained for the Nuer; since they are not animists and there is no evidence that they ever have been. But there is a further and more decisive reason for rejecting it. It supposes that the conception of Spirit derives and has developed from that of the soul, whereas in Nuer thought *kwoth*, Spirit, is something of quite a different nature from *tie*, soul. The soul is part of man and a created thing. Spirit is extrinsic to man, operating on him from outside him, and invasive. Nuer express the difference in nature between the human and the divine, between soul, or ghost, and Spirit when they say that 'God

[1] P. P. Howell, 'A Note on Elephants and Elephant Hunting among the Nuer', *Sudan Notes and Records*, 1945, p. 100.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

is a person of the above (*ran nhial*)' and that man, or ghost, 'is a person of the below (*ran piny*)'. The difference, and the contrast, is clearly seen in the Nuer belief that the soul of a person struck by lightning is changed into Spirit. It is evident also in the way they speak about their prophets and about sick persons. They say that Spirit comes from above and enters into them or takes hold of them. Since, therefore, Spirit and soul are conceived of as of different natures, the conception of Spirit cannot be derived from a development of the conception of soul. On the contrary, it is precisely because God and man are thought of as quite different sorts of being that Nuer can think of themselves in relation to God and that God can be represented in different ways to different persons and social groups. Therefore it is necessary, if we wish not only to avoid confusion but also to seize upon the essential content of Nuer religious thought, that we should speak of the 'soul' and not of the 'Spirit' of man and of the 'ghosts' and not of the 'spirits' of the departed.

It follows from the Nuer orientation towards Spirit that they are little interested in the ghosts of the dead, so long as they cause no trouble. When people 'disappear'—Nuer avoid using the word 'die'—only one thing is certain, that they have departed for good. 'They dwell apart, they have become ghosts.' It is taken for granted that people have some sort of existence after death, though Nuer do not presume to know where they have it or what kind of life it is that they lead. Sometimes they say that they may be under the earth and live a life like that they lived when they were on earth amid their cattle and dung fires in villages and camps. This seems to be the general opinion and it is perhaps strengthened by the discovery, when digging wells, of goats' dung and fire-stones deep down in the earth, for I have heard Nuer say that maybe these belong to the ghosts. But Nuer also say of a dead man '*ce mat ka kwoth*', 'he has joined God', and '*ce tiede wa nhial, ca ringde kwony*', 'his soul has gone above, (only) his flesh was buried'. One often hears also the idea expressed that the dead have lost their relationship to the living and have therefore no further claims on them for attentions and services, and that they have instead 'become kin to God' or have 'become God's people'. Sometimes Nuer say that since the dead are near to God they can intercede with him on behalf of their families and relatives. However, no one supposes he can know where is the *wec indit*, the great

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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of the departed. On such occasions Nuer usually have a definite ghost in mind, but in contexts in which the lineage as a whole is involved they may speak of *jook dial*, all the ghosts (of their lineage), though I have seldom heard them do so; and the reason for this is that when, on ceremonial occasions, Nuer speak of a lineage as a collectivity to which both dead and living belong they speak in terms of Spirit rather than of ghosts, of '*kwoth* which created our ancestor', rather than of the ancestor himself, and of '*kwoth* of our fathers', rather than the fathers themselves. The conception of the ghosts is subordinated to that of Spirit.

Nuer do not pray (*pal*) to the ghosts, which have no power in themselves to grant requests. On such occasions as I have mentioned they may invoke (*lam*) them, but even when they do this the ghosts take second place to God in some such phrases as '*kwoth, yene jook*', 'God, thou and the ghosts'. Even when beasts are reserved for them, Nuer do not formally dedicate them to the ghosts as they do to their spirits, and though they sacrifice on certain occasions on their behalf or in their honour or memory, I do not think that it can be said that sacrifice is ever made to them, at any rate not to them by themselves, for it may be that in those sacrifices in which God and the ghosts are invoked together Nuer think of the sacrifice being to both. Even if this is so, the victim is consecrated to God and not to the ghosts. Likewise, though the ghosts are associated with the *riek* or post-shrine which elderly men erect in their homes, it is a shrine firstly to God as God of the hearth and in whatever further refractions he may be figured as the guardian of the family and lineage. It is therefore called *riek kwoth*, God's shrine, and not *riek jookni*, ghosts' shrine. There is no cult of the dead, and their graves, not being marked, are soon forgotten unless a tree happens to spring from the tomb, when it may be named after the man buried there. A man's memorial is not in some monument but in his sons.

Dead persons, though for the most part only men, are remembered in their names, and this is a matter of great importance both for the Nuer themselves and also for an understanding on our part of their sentiments. Every man likes to feel that his name will never be forgotten so long as his lineage endures and that in that sense he will always be a part of the lineage. Consequently, Nuer do not so much think of the ghosts of their forebears as being those members of their lineage who are in the home of the dead,

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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789 827 who returns it to him after having first spat on it. When a father has agreed to his son's initiation the boy goes to a member of his father's age-set and this man plucks out a tuft of the boy's hair, spits on it, and brushes it against the boy's face and head. This is the blessing of the father's age-set. A leech massages a sick person with his spittle. Mr. B. A. Lewis records that when the Gaawar tribe chose a certain Bwoogh Kerpel to lead them across the Nile to conquer fresh lands from the Dinka the people lifted him on high so that God might see that he had been chosen, and they gave him a gourdful of milk to drink into which they had all spat.[1] In all these examples—and others could be given—there is the idea of blessing. However, a blessing can be given without spitting. Any person can bless another (pp. 16–17), but the blessings of those whose curses are most effective are also the most effective.

789 776 It is important to note that, as with curses, blessings are thought to be effective only because God makes them so. Just as a curse is an imprecatory prayer (for if God is not formally addressed in it it is understood that it is his affair), so a prayer is implied in a blessing. It is a benedictory prayer. Hence (and here again as with curses), a man can be aided merely by a person thinking well of him, bearing him in sweet recollection (*tim*) without formally blessing him. He blesses him in his heart, and just as God sees a man's just resentment for a wrong and the resentment then has the force of a curse, so he sees the love and the love has then the force of a blessing. So when a Nuer says '*ba ji tiem*', 'I will think of you', he means that he will think fondly of you and so blesses you. A good action in itself may bring fortune to a man. God sees it and it becomes, Nuer say, like a *biit* for good, just as he sees a bad action and it becomes a *biit* for ill.

789 776 626 The religious significance of cursing and blessing lies in a dominant motif of Nuer religion, that of *cuong* in opposition to *duer*, right in opposition to wrong. A person's curse of another is only effective if he is in the right and the other is in the wrong. There must have been damage or negligence, and in Nuer reckoning this implies a social relationship of some kind between the two persons, such as, in fact, is bound to exist between any persons so involved in Nuer society. It is when the obligations of a relationship have not been observed that a curse can act, its effectiveness increasing with the closeness or social significance of the relation-

[1] B. A. Lewis, 'Nuer Spokesmen', *Sudan Notes and Records*, 1951, p. 81.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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789 ship; and it can be quieted by reparation to the wronged person.
776 In an account of Nuer religion what is here important is that the
626 curse is only effective, Nuer say, because God sees that one man has right and the other wrong and allows it to act. It seems to the observer therefore that the curse, like the blessing, has its own psychic power, but that Nuer relate it to a set of moral rules of which God is conceived of as guardian and judge. The power of a curse or a blessing thus lies ultimately not with man, who is only the medium, but with God. God's role is not merely permissive, for, as we have noted, a wrong itself may, through the sufferings and lamentations of the wronged persons, bring retribution to the wrongdoers without their taking any action in the matter themselves. This is why also Nuer say of the infringement of a religious interdiction, in which no immediate question of wrong to another may arise, that it has a certain similarity to a *biit*. Formally the two ideas are quite distinct, and Nuer see a similarity between them only because in both cases there is a fault which is punished by God, in the first case indirectly and in the second directly. Consequently we are once again faced with the Nuer idea of faults, which necessitates a fuller discussion than I have so far given to it but which is also more appropriately treated separately in the next chapter.

775 The concept of *cien*, to which I now turn, has certain similarities
626 to that of *biit*, especially to the silent curse, 'the curse of the heart'. Nuer think that it bodes ill for those who have wronged a man if he dies with resentment in his heart, for he will then take ghostly vengeance on them from the grave.

The word *cien* is found in one form or another, and with common elements of meaning, in all the Nilotic languages. In Nuer it means the vengeance, generally producing sickness or other misfortune ending in death, taken by an aggrieved ghost on the living, and in its verbal form the taking of such vengeance. Nuer regard it as a most serious matter if a man dies with a legitimate grievance in his heart, for while it may be possible to make amends to a living man for a wrong done to him and thereby rid oneself of his *biit*, it is often impossible to make peace with the dead. Fear of *cien* undoubtedly, if we are to believe what Nuer say, makes them avoid, at any rate sometimes, persistently denying men justice lest they take their wrongs to the grave and from there seek settlement.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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CHAPTER VII

SIN

I

NUER do not think of the relation of man to God as one of soul, as a separate entity, to Spirit but as one of the whole man to Spirit. The state of the conscience, as we would call it, may be one element in the relation but peace of mind is very much bound up with welfare of body and estate. This is evident from the way they regard the breach of an interdiction which is thought to bring into operation directly, and often almost immediately, spiritual sanctions. We may speak of such a breach as sin.

Sin with the suffering it brings about is central to the study of Nuer religion. If God was thought by Nuer merely to have created man and then to have ceased to interest himself in human affairs there would be no point at all in their paying any attention to him and sacrifice would be a meaningless act. It is because Spirit constantly manifests itself to men and intervenes in their enterprises and affairs that we have the subject of this book, a religion. I draw attention again to the paradox I mentioned in Chapter I, of God being far away in the sky and yet present with men on earth; but we now see that it might better be described as an intuitive understanding of the relation between God and man. God is far removed from man in that man cannot ascend to him. He is very near in that he can descend to man.

Nuer, like other people, want it both ways. They want God to be near at hand, for his presence aids them, and they want him to be far away, for it is dangerous to them. It is particularly dangerous in such situations and relationships as are marked off by religious interdictions.

One of the more important interdictory concepts is that of *thek*, a word we have had occasion to consider earlier in connexion with totems. It has a sense which I translate 'to respect', the word 'respect' being used throughout this book only where Nuer would use *thek*. The word has a similar, but perhaps wider, range of meaning among the Dinka.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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196 784 [834] [841] [234] and while she is suckling an infant, for a child born of union in these forbidden periods is a child of misfortune. A woman in her periods respects the milk of cows; she may only drink goat's milk at this time. Nuer also use the word *thek* to refer to the prohibition on men milking cows. Men respect the cows with regard to milking. Milking is done only by women and boys. It can happen, however, that on journeys there are no women or boys present, and in these circumstances men may milk the cows on condition that each gets another to milk his cows for him. I learnt in 1936 that a youth, Tot, who in 1931 had been a member of my household, had died as a result of having milked a cow at night in the byre of his home and drunk the milk.

196 776 784 One of the commonest uses of *thek* is, as we have seen, in reference to totems. A man respects his totem by refraining from harming it in any way (pp. 64 seq.). The respect is mutual and the totem should refrain from harming those who respect it. We have also noted earlier (p. 129) the respect relationship between twins and birds. The word is also used for the attitude of a man towards his fetish.

196 784 *Thek* has, therefore, in all its contexts of usage a sense of deference, constraint, modesty or shyness, or a mixture of these attitudes. It seems often to carry as part of its load of meaning a feeling of embarrassment which is entirely lacking in the ordinary behaviour of Nuer towards persons and nature. The behaviour associated with it is formalistic and includes always avoidance and abstention, though it will have been observed that these need not be absolute. A man does not in any way avoid his cows except with regard to (*ke kwi*) milking them.[1]

The purpose and function of these respect relationships are

observes or honours (*luth*) the days of her indisposition. On the other hand, *thek* may be used to speak of a woman being in her periods, it being understood that what she respects are the cattle. The word can thus be used as a polite euphemism for 'to menstruate'.

[1] While a man does not respect a cow dedicated to a spirit, Dr. Smith tells me that he can be said to respect it with regard to milk and marriage. Only members of his family may drink its milk and it must not be used for marriage, unless in either case the spirit gives its consent. Dr. Lienhardt tells me that a man can also be said to respect such a cow with regard to urine, in that he does not use it for domestic purposes. As I was not aware of these particular usages of the word *thek* I can only record this information without discussing it. A breach of the prohibitions would certainly involve liability (pp. 39–40) but it would not be classed as *nueer*.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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the word *dil* has generally the sense of 'pure', 'true', 'perfect', or 'aristocratic'. It is the ox of perfection. It is the young man's friend and companion. He plays with it and fondles it. He composes poems about it and sings them to it, and he gets a small boy to lead it round the camp in the morning or evening as he leaps behind it chanting poems. He walks among the cattle at night ringing a cattle-bell and singing of his kin, his loves, and his cattle, and he praises this ox among all other oxen. He makes tassels to hang from one of its horns, and he loves to see it toss the tassel in the air with a sweep of the neck. He acquires an iron bell to hang round its neck, and no music, unless it be the ox's lowing, is sweeter to his ears than its tinkling in the pastures. He goes to the edge of the camp to meet it when it returns from grazing in the evening. He is never tired of describing its points, and as he does so, and also in dancing, he may hold up his arms in imitation of its horns. Should the ox die he is downcast; and should he die it must be sacrificed at his mortuary ceremony.

The youth now also enters through this ox into a new kind of relationship with God, the guardian spirits of his family and lineage, and the ghosts of his ancestors. When he has tethered it in the kraal for the night he may pet it, removing ticks from its belly and scrotum and picking out adherent dung from its anus; and he may at the same time rub ashes on its back. Ordinarily I think he does this simply because the ox, which has suffered from parasites throughout the day, gets relief from its back being rubbed, but I was told that he may occasionally as he does so speak a few words to God or to the ghosts. While it is not until a man marries and has children and an independent household that he sacrifices

FIG. 5
Hollowed-out ambatch log, used as stool, &c.

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231 883 776 animals, dedicates them to spirits, and in other ways makes formal use of them for religious purposes, nevertheless, the ox a father gives his son at initiation provides him with a direct means of communication with the spiritual world. It is more than a possession, more even than part of his social personality—it is a point of meeting between soul and spirit and has therefore a sacramental character also.

231 553 From the colours, their distribution, the shape of the horns, and other peculiarities of the ox of his initiation a youth takes, or is given by his companions, his *cot thak*, his ox-name. It may be the same word as that by which the ox's markings are indicated, but generally it combines the name for the markings with a prefix descriptive of something connected with the ox. For example, a man whose favourite ox is black and white (*rial*) may call himself *Luthrial* or *Luerial*, *luth* being a large cattle-bell and *lue* a long tassel attached to one of the horns. At first only his age-mates may [561] know his new name, but the older people soon get to know it too, for they hear his mates greet him by it and they also hear him shout it out as he displays himself with the ox in the cattle camps which are formed soon after initiation. Also, young men of about the same age call out their ox-names, with many embellishments, to one another at dances, often after a bout of duelling with clubs, and when in a dance two lines of youths stand opposite each other and shower ox-names on one another preparatory to a spectacular jump into the air in unison.

The calling of a youth by a name the same as, or derived from, that by which his favourite ox is referred to is perhaps the most striking example of, and evidence for, what Professor Seligman speaks of as 'identification'. Indeed, in listening to Nuer poems [538] one is often in doubt whether it is the ox or the man that is being spoken about. The representations are never entirely distinct. Somewhat different, though related and also very striking, is the [552] custom called *thak moc*, the calling out of the (name of the) ox. A man shouts out the name of his favourite ox—the ox's name, not his ox-name, which may be an elaboration of the ox's name —when he hurls his spear at an enemy or at his quarry when hunting or fishing, for example, '*ma rial*', 'black-and-white (ox)', or '*thakda ma rial*', 'my black-and-white ox'. In some of my earlier writings I have translated *moc* by 'invocation' and 'to invoke', following Driberg's translation of the Lango

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782 121 tion, *vita pro vita*. If it were not so it would be difficult to understand at all why offerings to God should be immolated. The life can only be given by its liberation through death, as Professor E. O. James emphasizes in his *Origins of Sacrifice*.[1] Substitution, a common enough interpretation of sacrifice,[2] is the central meaning of the rites—they are a giving or exchange or an expiation in that sense—whatever other ideas are mixed up in it or become attached to it.

But to sum up the meaning of Nuer piacular sacrifices in a single word scarcely does justice to the very complex set of ideas they express. We have found it necessary to use a variety of words in speaking of them: communion, gift, apotropaic rite, bargain, exchange, ransom, elimination, expulsion, purification, expiation, propitiation, substitution, abnegation, homage, and others. According to situation and particular purpose one element in this complex of meaning may be stressed in one rite and another element in another rite, or there are shifts in emphasis from one part of the sacrificial rite to another. The matter becomes yet more complicated and resistant to precise definition when we take into consideration the scale on which Spirit is figured to Nuer on different levels, and also their collective sacrifices, for in this chapter I have so far been discussing only sacrifices to God and only those made to him which belong to the piacular class.

III

782 776 In piacular sacrifices to God the *do ut des* notion, some sort of exchange or bargain, may never be entirely absent but it appears in a refined and sublimated form. The favour requested does not follow automatically the sacrifice, *ex opere operato*. God is not compelled by the sacrifice to grant it. It is indeed obvious, to Nuer as well as to us, that, apart from there being no means by which bargaining with God can be conducted, it is no use trying to haggle with him, because he is master of everything and can want nothing. Nor is there any idea that God is at fault if he does not give what is asked for in sacrifice; in his dealings with man he always has the *cuong*, is in the right. But when we examine sacri-

[1] 1933, *passim*. His interpretation, as I understand it, of primitive sacrifice in terms of the *do ut possis dare* motif does not, however, accord with Nuer ideas.

[2] Given, among anthropologists, some emphasis by Edward Westermarck (*The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, 1908, vol. ii, pp. 616 seq.).

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fices to spirits of the air and of the earth the relations between Spirit and man are somewhat different and colour the meaning of the sacrifices accordingly. The lesser spirits are in competition, and if one of them has a cow dedicated to it its prestige is thereby increased. They do not, as God does, own all the beasts anyhow, but only those men give to them. This is why one dedicates beasts to the spirits but only rarely and in very special circumstances to God, for there is little point in giving him what is his already. Likewise, a sacrificed life, which is God's anyhow, is something spirits are thought to gain. Further, since God needs nothing he does not ask for anything. He does not demand sacrifices of men and cause them ill if they are not made. The spirits do. They demand attention, and they are not to be satisfied with cucumbers. They require bloody offerings. And if they are not given animal sacrifices they seize their devotees and make them sick. Nuer, therefore, do not hesitate to bargain with these spirits, speaking through their mediums, in a downright way which astonished me. The sense of the bargain is always the same: if we give you an ox or a sheep or a goat will you leave the sick man alone that he may recover; or what do you require of us this year in sacrifice that we may not be troubled by you? The lower in the scale is the conception of Spirit the more it is thought of as taking delight in what is offered.

Thus even though sacrifices to God and to the spirits may both have a piacular purpose and though the apotropaic element in both is very evident they cannot have precisely the same meaning. Even in piacular sacrifices to God there may be much variation of meaning, as, for example, between those in which the idea of expiation is most in evidence, such as those made to wipe out some definite sin like incest, and those made so that people may recover from wounds and ailments not attributed to specific offences and which, therefore, do not have the same moral connotation. But in either case the general attitude is the same. Man approaches God through sacrifice and asks for aid. It is man and not God who benefits by the sacrifice. Man's attitude in these sacrifices contrasts with his attitude in the case of sacrifices to spirits who have seized people to exact gifts from them or may do so if they are not satisfied. It is true that men generally have a feeling that the spirits would not have troubled them if they had been given their due and that their devotees have only themselves to blame if they have

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782 neglected them, and also that men give to the spirits for the same
776 reason that they often give to God, that they may be left alone.
But the psychology of gifts to spirits is different. Here the substitution is blended with the idea of propitiation and satisfaction rather than of expiation or solicitation for aid, and the experience is on a different level of thought. Man does not wrestle with God, but here man and a spirit are pitted against one another, and the huckstering is conducted through a human agency—is, in fact, between humans, between the sacrificer and the representative of a spirit, a prophet and generally a very minor one. God has no such representatives. The leopard-skin priests are men's representatives to him, not his representatives to men. We are here faced again with the problem of the one and the many; and we see in these differences of attitude in sacrifices to God and in those made to lesser spirits a facet of the ambiguity of the idea of Spirit, the source of good and ill, as represented in the paradox of unity and plurality.

782 Thus we see that in Nuer sacrifice there are different shades of meaning. The pattern varies. There are shifts of emphasis. Any attempt to present a general interpretation, to put forward a simple formula to cover all Nuer sacrifices, meets with further difficulty when we turn to the collective and confirmatory sacrifices. Here the intention is clearly different. God, or whichever of his refractions may be involved, is not angry and therefore does not have to be propitiated. No sin has been committed which must be expiated, and there is no situation requiring expiation in the broader sense of payment to be rid of a state of danger due to the presence of Spirit. Life is not usually endangered so there is no need for substitution. Initiations and weddings are occasions of mirth, and even mortuary ceremonies, though they are solemn occasions, mark the end of mourning and therefore have a joyous side to them. There may always be some element of anxiety in these *rites de passage*, and perhaps also—it is difficult to say—of a feeling of the possibility of fault. In some confirmatory sacrifices, those concerned with death, these elements are manifest, but in others, such as marriage ceremonies, they are not evident and the stress is rather on ensuring the success of a social activity and validating it. As I have said earlier, we cannot make a rigid distinction between the one type of sacrifice and the other. Mortuary sacrifices might be placed in either class, according to the point of view.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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PRIESTS AND PROPHETS

I have discussed the question stated that in old days, before *deng*, the first of the air-spirits to fall to earth, entered into men towards the end of last century there were no prophets at all, only the *kuar*, the priests. I have suggested in an earlier book that their appearance might be explained by historical events—the expansion of the Nuer and, more particularly, the threat to their independence by northern Arab slavers, the Mahdists, and Anglo-Egyptian rule, which required, if it were to be met, greater political unity and the development of political authority. This view accords also with what has been said in general about the relation of Nuer religious conceptions to their social structure. It is possible that some of the prophets might have established political authority and leadership overriding local loyalties and sectional interests had they been allowed to, for prophetic powers tend to become hereditary, passing to whichever son is susceptible. Thus the mantle of Ngundeng fell upon his son Gwek, who was more a political, and less a religious, figure than his father had been; and the mantle of Deng Leaka fell upon his son Dwal. The Government effectively stopped development in this direction. Direct British administration was instituted, and no more influential prophets emerged. On the other hand, far from the idea of spirits—air-spirits, totemic and totemistic spirits, nature sprites, and fetish spirits—dwelling among men having been eclipsed it has spread more widely and in ever-increasing variety. This was already beginning to happen when I was in Nuerland (in the years 1930, 1931, 1935, and 1936), but the Nuer of the areas in which I carried out most of my research, the Lou and eastern Jikany tribes, had heard of only a few of the many spirits already familiar to those to the west of the Nile. So strongly have they now invaded these territories that, Dr. Lienhardt tells me, they have established themselves among the Anuak, who live yet farther to the east and had no knowledge of them as late as 1940. If my interpretation of the emergence and proliferation of new religious conceptions in terms of structure and structural developments is correct it would follow that we have here a counterpart in religious thought to an increasing fragmentation and individualization amounting by this time to a breakdown of the traditional social order.

Historical circumstances have brought the Nuer into closer communication at all points with foreign ideas; and the breakdown of their traditional way of life and the taking over of some

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792 of these ideas are part of the same process of change. As we have
●776 noted, they say of their air-spirits which inspire their prophets,
182 and also in general of spirits which have fallen from above to
[177] earth, that they took them over from foreign peoples, mostly from the Dinka; and it is also possible that, as Mr. H. C. Jackson suggests,[1] there is a relation between the appearance of prophets among the Nuer and the spread of Dervish influence, for it was about the time of the Mahdist upheaval that their first prophets arose, and I was expressly told by one Nuer that the first spirit they heard of entering men was *madi* (?al-Mahdi) in the lands of the north and that afterwards they heard of *deng* and then of other spirits.

792 Although the emergence of prophets can be interpreted in terms
182 of historical events and structural changes just as the priesthood can be interpreted in terms of the functioning of the traditional tribal system, the prophet's significance for an understanding of Nuer religious thought calls for comment not required in the case of the priest. The rise of prophets and the increase of every other kind of 'owners' of spirits may indeed be a response, first to a challenge and then to disintegration, but it is a response made within a set of religious conceptions and has, therefore, a significance for the study of those conceptions without regard to whatever it may have been which occasioned the response. That the response should have taken a religious form does not surprise us, for that has been a common enough reaction to European rule in Africa and elsewhere, and the Nuer are, in any case, conspicuously religious. What claims our attention is rather the kind of religious form it took, a form which is at the same time both a development of potentialities in their traditional religion and a change in its character. We have seen in an earlier chapter how the Nuer notion of Spirit lends itself to refraction without limits. If this had not been so all the new spiritual conceptions which have arisen in the course of the last two generations could not have come into existence without entirely changing the character of Nuer religious thought. As it is, they have partly changed it.

[1] Op. cit., p. 91.

16: Evans-Pritchard
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[For discussion of God and spirits, see category 116, pp. 1-22, 28-104, 106-143.]